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Police-reported robbery in Canada, 2008

by Mia Dauvergne

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Symbols

. not available for any reference period
.. not available for a specific reference period
... not applicable
0 true zero or a value rounded to zero
0^s value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
^{p} preliminary
^{r} revised
x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
^{E} use with caution
F too unreliable to be published

Police-reported robbery in Canada, 2008: Highlights

- In 2008, police reported about 32,000 robberies, accounting for 7% of all violent crime. The robbery rate has been relatively stable in recent years, following an 11% decrease between 1999 and 2002.

- The national decline in the rate of police-reported robberies from 10 years ago was largely the result of decreases in Quebec, British Columbia and Manitoba. Not all areas of the country have experienced decreases, however. The rate in Newfoundland and Labrador, for example, has more than doubled over the past decade, although it continues to be well below the national average.

- The highest rates of police-reported robbery are in western Canada, particularly Manitoba, similar to the trend for violent crime in general. Among census metropolitan areas, Winnipeg, Regina and Saskatoon had the highest rates in 2008.

- The overall drop in robberies since 1999 was driven by a decrease in the number of commercial robberies, which account for about 4 in 10 incidents. In particular, bank robberies fell 38% while robberies of gas stations and convenience stores dropped 32%.

- Robberies occurring in outdoor public places (including those on the street) have remained relatively stable over the past decade at about half of all incidents. Of note, robberies in public transit facilities have doubled since 1999, although they continue to account for a relatively low proportion of all incidents.

- After increasing 38% between 1999 and 2005, robberies occurring in a residence, often referred to as "home invasions", have remained relatively stable. In 2008, residential robberies accounted for about 1 in 10 incidents.

- The use of weapons to commit robbery has generally decreased over the past decade. In particular, the rate of robbery with a firearm steadily declined until 2002 and has remained stable since at about 14% of all robberies.

- As with most crimes, robberies are usually committed by young males. In 2008, almost 9 in 10 accused persons were male. The highest rates of robbery were among those 15 to 18 years of age.

Police-reported robbery in Canada, 2008

By Mia Dauvergne

Robbery is defined as an incident of theft that also involves violence or the threat of violence. These types of offences are considered to be among the most serious of violent crimes committed in Canada. According to the *Criminal Code*, a person convicted of robbery may be subject to a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. In addition, robberies that involve a firearm or those that are committed for the benefit of a criminal organization carry a mandatory minimum penalty of five years imprisonment.[1]

The risk of being a victim of robbery tends to be greater than the risk posed by most other types of violent crime. The only violent crimes that occur more often than robbery are assault and uttering threats. And, while most violence occurs between people who know one another, robberies are usually committed by a stranger.

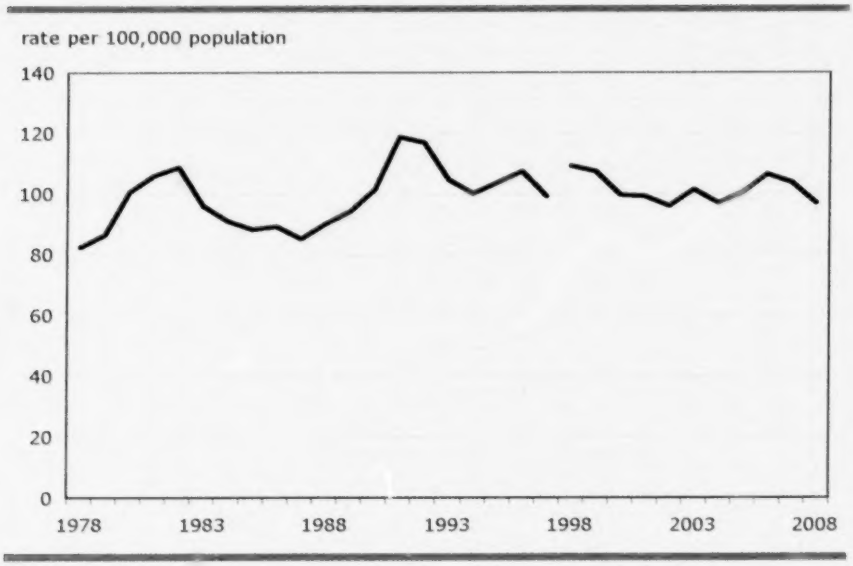
This *Juristat* article examines the nature and extent of robbery in Canada using data from the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) survey.[2] The UCR survey provides information on the characteristics of robbery incidents that have been reported to, and substantiated by, police services.

Robberies relatively stable since 2002

In 2008, police services reported about 32,000 robberies in Canada (Table 1), representing 7% of all violent crimes and 1% of all *Criminal Code* offences.[3] About one-quarter of robberies also involved an additional violation, most commonly a weapon offence (such as possession of a prohibited weapon), assault or uttering threats.

The past 10 years show two distinct trends in the rate of police-reported robbery (Chart 1). The first is between 1999 and 2002, when the rate declined 11%. Since then, the robbery rate has remained relatively stable, despite annual fluctuations.[4]

Chart 1
Police-reported robbery, Canada, 1978 to 2008



Note: Revisions have been applied to robbery back to 1998. As such, there is a break in the data series between 1997 and 1998 and any comparisons between the two time series should be made with caution.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR1 and UCR2 Aggregate) Survey.

Some researchers have explored the relationship between robbery rates and certain socio-demographic and economic conditions. A report by Statistics Canada concluded that among four factors (unemployment, inflation, age distribution of the population and per capita alcohol consumption) only inflation was significantly associated with changes in the level of robbery (Pottie-Bunge, Johnson and Baldé, 2005). In other words, as the inflation rate increased (or decreased) so too did the rate of robbery.

Other research from the United States has examined the relationship between robbery and consumer sentiment, a measure of the degree of optimism that consumers feel about the overall state of the economy and their personal financial situation (Rosenfeld and Fornango, 2007). These authors found that negative consumer sentiment was associated with increased robbery rates. This premise has yet to be tested in Canada, however.

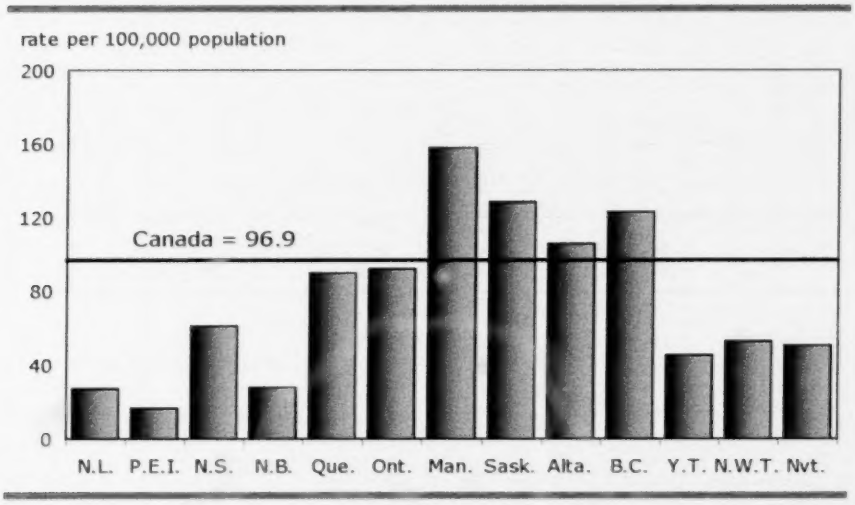
Declines in robbery greatest in Quebec, British Columbia and Manitoba

The overall decline in Canada's rate of robbery since 1999 has not been universal across the country. In fact, the national drop has been largely driven by decreases in three provinces: Quebec (-30%), British Columbia (-22%) and Manitoba (-20%) (Table 2). The rates in most of the census metropolitan areas (CMAs) in these provinces also declined between 1999 and 2008, with Québec, Victoria, Montréal and Vancouver among those cities with the largest drops (Table 3).

There are some exceptions to the overall decreasing trend in police-reported robbery, most notably in Newfoundland and Labrador where the rate more than doubled from 10 years ago. There were also large jumps in the eastern CMAs of St. John's and Saint John, although the 2008 rates in both cities remained below the national average. The rate in Thunder Bay also increased substantially from 10 years ago, despite declining in 2008. Among the large CMAs, Hamilton reported the greatest increase, although, as in Thunder Bay, the 2008 rate was lower than in 2007.

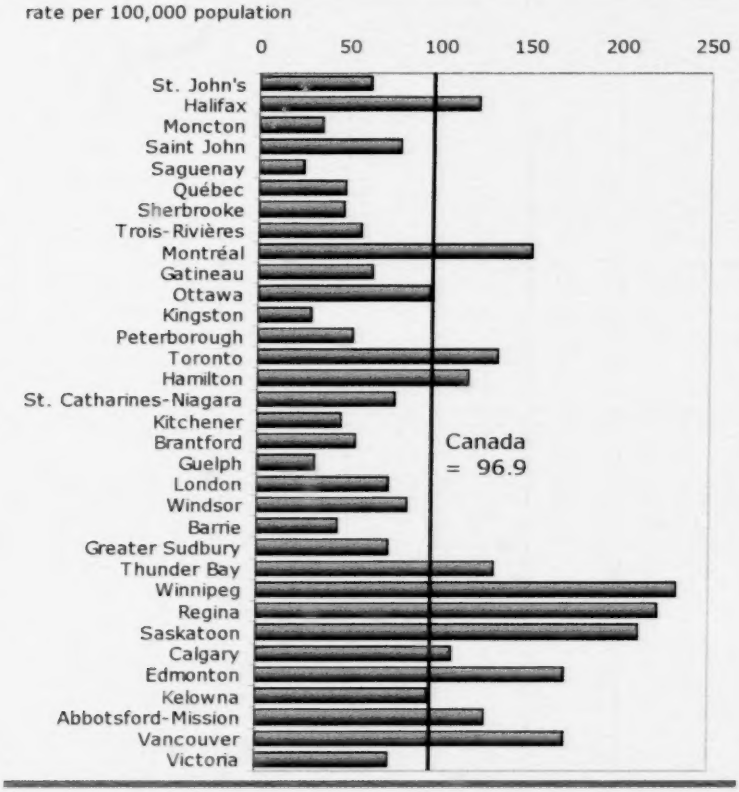
One of the most consistent trends in robbery is the higher than average rates in the western provinces, particularly Manitoba (Chart 2). At the CMA level, Winnipeg, Regina and Saskatoon had the highest rates in 2008 (Chart 3), findings that have persisted for nearly a decade. This pattern is similar to that for police-reported crime rates in general, including violent crime.

Chart 2
Police-reported robbery by province and territory, 2008



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2 Aggregate) Survey.

Chart 3
Police-reported robbery, by census metropolitan area, 2008



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2 Aggregate) Survey.

In eastern and central Canada, the only CMAs with above-average rates of robbery in 2008 were Montréal, Toronto, Thunder Bay, Halifax and Hamilton. The lowest rates in the country were reported in Saguenay, Kingston, Guelph and Moncton.

The 2008 rates of robbery in the territories were about half the national average, similar to the findings reported over the past decade. This trend departs from the pattern for most other types of crime which tend to be higher in the territories.

Decline in commercial robberies drives overall decrease

In general, there are three major categories of robbery: those that occur in outdoor public locations (such as streets, parks, parking lots or transit stations), those that occur in commercial or institutional locations (such as banks, convenience stores, gas stations or schools) and those that occur in residences. In 2008, these types of robberies accounted for 50%, 39% and 10% of all robberies, respectively (Table 4). Chart 4 shows the 10-year trend in the first two categories while Chart 6 shows the trend in residential robberies.[5, 6]

The overall decline in police-reported robberies over the past 10 years was driven primarily by fewer incidents committed in commercial or institutional locations, down by 34%. In particular, robberies in banks (or other financial institutions) have decreased by 38% over the past decade and robberies of gas stations or convenience stores have dropped 32%.

The decrease in the number of commercial robberies may be partly related to the increased use and sophistication of loss prevention and detection devices by business owners. A 2008 survey of Canadian retailers found that the use of closed circuit monitoring systems, silent alarms as well as armored car pick-ups and drop-offs increased from the year before (Retail Council of Canada and PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2008 and 2009). It is possible that a fear of apprehension deters some individuals from engaging in this type of robbery.

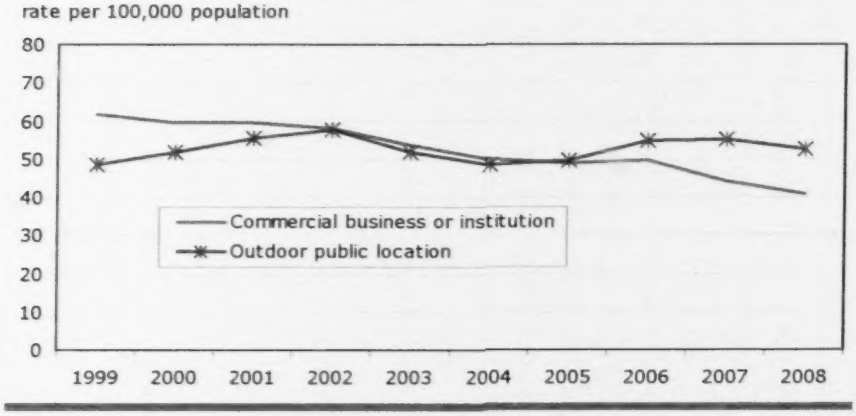
When robberies are examined by specific commercial location, differences emerge from the overall CMA pattern. For example, the rates of bank robberies in Vancouver and Abbotsford–Mission in 2008 were well above those in any other CMA. Robberies of gas stations or convenience stores, on the other hand, were highest in Montréal.

One type of commercial robbery that has received media attention in recent years involves the theft of various prescription painkillers, such as hydrocodone, oxycodone or oxycontin, from pharmacies (CBC News, 2009; Tong, 2009; The Windsor Star, 2009). It is not possible to measure the incidence of pharmaceutical robberies from the UCR survey, however, as this level of detail is not available.

Robberies most likely to occur on the street

The second major category of robbery, incidents that occur in outdoor public locations, has remained relatively stable over the past decade (Chart 4). Within this grouping are incidents that occur on the street, the most common location of all robberies. The 2008 rates for street robberies were highest in Saskatoon, Regina and Winnipeg.

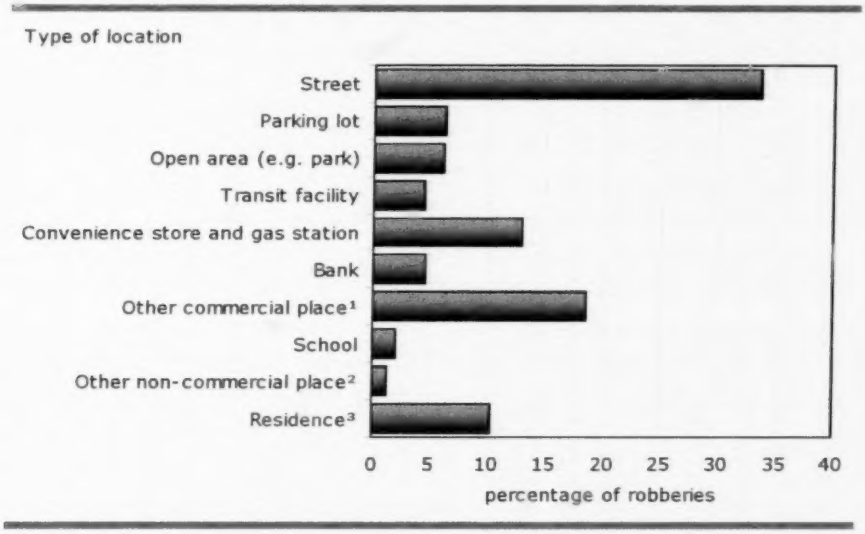
Chart 4
Police-reported robbery by type of location, Canada, 1999 to 2008



Note: Based upon data collected from police services covering 54% of the Canadian population.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2 Trend) Survey.

Transit robberies, including those that occur at bus stops and in subway stations, are another type of robbery included in this category. These types of incidents doubled over the past decade with Edmonton, Montréal, Thunder Bay, Toronto and Vancouver reporting the highest rates of transit robberies among all CMAs in 2008. Overall, however, these types of incidents continued to comprise a relatively low proportion of all robberies (4%) (Chart 5).

Chart 5
Police-reported robbery by type of location, Canada, 2008



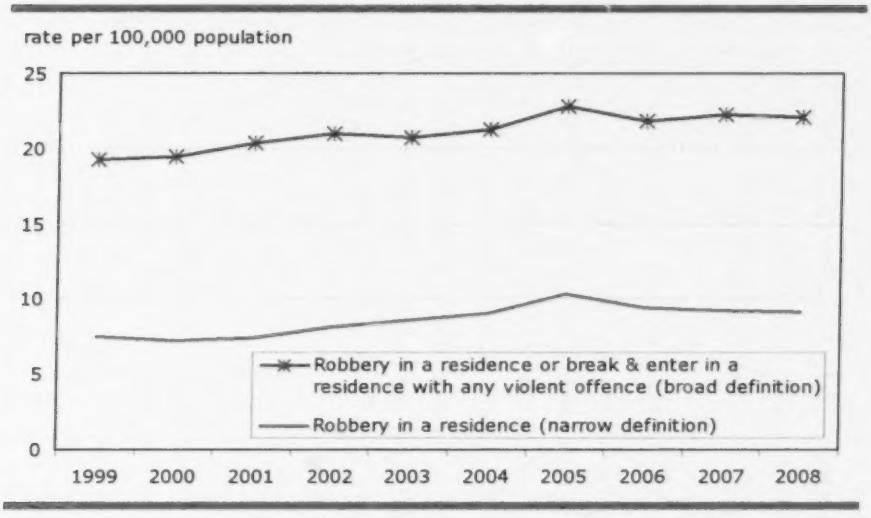
1. Examples of "other commercial places" include grocery stores and pharmacies.
2. Examples of "other non-commercial places" include community centres, hospitals and churches.
3. Includes private dwelling units and other private property structures.
Note: Based upon data collected from police services covering 98% of the Canadian population.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2 Incident-based) Survey.

In general, robberies are solved by police less often than other types of violent crime. Robberies that occur in outdoor public locations, however, are particularly unlikely to be solved by police. In 2008, police solved 27% of robberies that were in an outdoor public location compared to 45% of commercial robberies and 47% of residential robberies. In comparison, 70% of other violent crimes were solved by police.

Residential robberies stable since 2005

Residential robberies are sometimes associated with the term "home invasion". Using data from the UCR survey, home invasion can be defined in two ways. The first "narrow" definition simply includes all robberies that occur in a residential dwelling, as reflected in Table 4. The second "broad" definition includes robberies that occur in a residential dwelling as well as break and enters that have an associated violent offence. Regardless of which definition is used, the upward trend to 2005, followed by relative stability, is similar (Chart 6).

Chart 6
Police-reported home invasion, Canada, 1999 to 2008



Note: Based upon data collected from police services covering 54% of the Canadian population.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2 Trend) Survey.

Using the narrow definition, the rate of police-reported home invasions rose by 38% between 1999 and 2005 and has remained stable since. In 2008, approximately 2,700 such incidents came to the attention of police. The census metropolitan area of Hamilton reported the highest rate of residential robberies in the country. Using the broad definition of home invasion, however, the rates in Thunder Bay and Saskatoon were slightly higher than in Hamilton.

Previous research shows older adults (65 years and older) to be less likely than younger age groups to be victimized by violent crime, including robbery (Ogrodnik, 2007). That said, older adults tend to be at greater risk for home invasion than for other types of robbery.[7] In 2008, 6% of victims involved in a home invasion were 65 years or older, compared to 3% who were robbed on the street or other outdoor public location and 2% who were robbed in a commercial or institutional establishment. About 2% of victims of total violent crime in 2008 were 65 years or older.

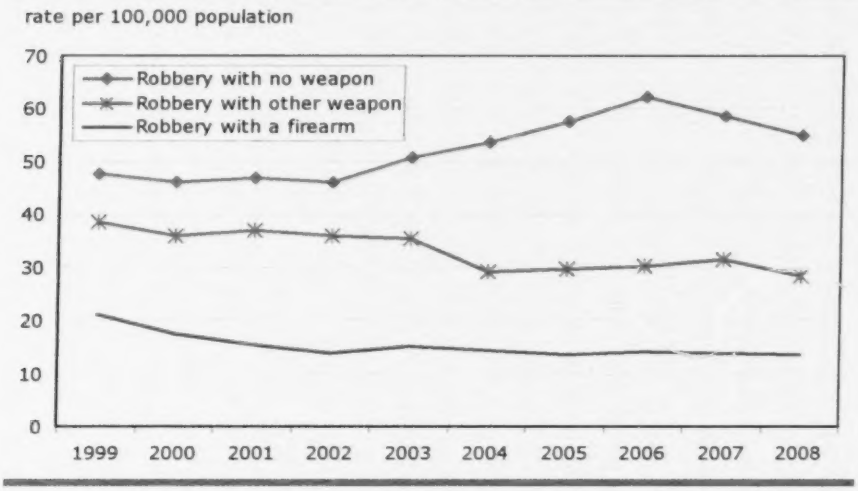
Information on robberies that have been solved by police shows that most robberies are committed by strangers, regardless of the particular location of the incident. However, residential robberies (i.e. "home invasions") tend to involve strangers less often than those that occur in commercial locations or on the street. In 2008, 63% of all home invasions were committed by strangers compared to about 90% of other robberies. A substantial portion of residential robberies were committed by acquaintances[8] of the victim (28%), some of which may have involved the settling of accounts stemming from illegal activity.

Solved incidents also provide information on persons accused of robbery. These data show that robberies tend to involve multiple accused more often than other types of violent crime, particularly when the robbery occurs in a residence. In 2008, 11% of total robberies and 17% of residential robberies were committed by two or more accused persons. In comparison, 6% of incidents involving other violent crimes involved multiple accused.

Use of weapons to commit robbery declines

Another change in the nature of police-reported robbery over the past 10 years pertains to the use of weapons. The involvement of weapons, such as firearms or knives, to commit robbery has gradually declined while the use of physical force or threats (but no weapon) was higher in 2008 than a decade earlier (Chart 7). In 2008, robberies without a weapon accounted for more than half (57%) of all incidents.

Chart 7
Police-reported robbery by type of weapon, Canada, 1999 to 2008



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR1 Aggregate) Survey.

There has been a particularly notable decline in robberies committed with a firearm, especially when the longer-term trend is examined. Between 1977 (when this information first became available) and 2002, the rate of firearm-related robbery steadily dropped and has remained relatively stable since. Nevertheless, in 2008, a firearm was used to commit 14% of robberies. Robberies in commercial or institutional locations as well as those in residences involved firearms more often than those that occurred on the street.

Despite the inherently violent nature of robbery, most incidents do not result in physical injury to victims. In 2008, 98% of victims suffered little to no injury. However, 2% of victims required professional medical attention at the scene of the incident or transportation to a medical facility. Information from the Homicide Survey indicates that there were 20 homicides that occurred during the course of a robbery in 2008, representing about 3% of all homicides.

Money most common type of property stolen

A primary motivation for robbery is financial gain. Police-reported data show that money (including cash, cheques, stocks or bonds) was the most common item stolen during the course of a robbery in 2008, reported in 37% of all incidents.[9]

Other popular items reported stolen in 2008 included:

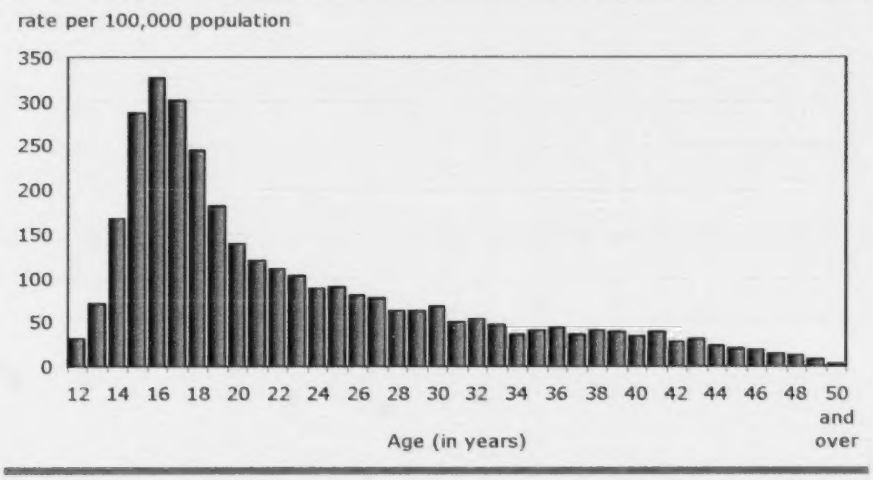
- personal accessories, such as jewellery, purses or clothing (18% of incidents);
- electronic devices, such as cell phones, personal music devices, cameras, computers, televisions or stereos, items that can often be sold by offenders for a quick profit (15%); and,
- identification or credit cards (9%).

In 2008, "robbery to steal a firearm" was introduced as a new *Criminal Code* offence. In that year, police reported the theft of a firearm in 55 robberies, accounting for less than 1% of all robbery incidents.

Robbery rates highest among youth and young adults

Like many crimes, robbery is committed predominately by young males. In 2008, 87% of all those accused of robbery were male and nearly two-thirds were between 12 and 24 years of age. Of all accused persons, the highest rates were among 15 to 18 year-olds (Chart 8).

Chart 8
Persons accused of police-reported robbery by age, Canada, 2008



Note: Based upon data collected from police services covering 98% of the Canadian population.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey.

The rates for male adults as well as both male and female youth (12 to 17 years) have been relatively stable over the past decade. However, the rate of adult females charged with robbery climbed 27%.

The type of robbery committed by adults and youth tends to differ. The 2008 police-reported data show that youth were most likely to commit robbery in an outdoor public location (64%) whereas adults were most likely to be involved in robberies of commercial or institutional establishments (51%).

Summary

Over the past 10 years, the extent and nature of robbery in Canada has changed. Between 1999 and 2002, the national police-reported rate fell 11% and has remained stable since. The greatest decreases have occurred in Quebec, British Columbia and Manitoba. The overall decline in robberies was primarily the result of fewer commercial and institutional robberies, which declined by 34% over this period. The use of weapons to commit robbery also declined, particularly those involving a firearm.

Detailed data tables

Table 1
Police-reported robery in Canada, 1999 to 2008

Year	number	rate per 100,000 population	percent change from previous year[1]
1999	32,593	107.2	-1.6
2000	30,582	99.7	-7.0
2001	30,756	99.2	-0.5
2002	30,036	95.8	-3.4
2003	32,084	101.4	5.9
2004	30,990	97.0	-4.3
2005	32,437	100.6	3.7
2006	34,641	106.3	5.7
2007	34,182	103.8	-2.4
2008	32,281	96.9	-6.7

1. Percent change based upon unrounded rates.
Note: Counts are based upon the most serious offence in the incident. One incident may involve multiple violations.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2 AGG) Survey.

Table 2
Police-reported robbery by province and territory, 2008

Province or territory	number	rate per 100,000 population	percent change in rate from 2007 to 2008[1]	percent change in rate from 1999 to 2008[1]
Newfoundland and Labrador	139	27.4	-13.9	114.7
Prince Edward Island	23	16.4	42.0	6.8
Nova Scotia	575	61.3	-15.8	24.4
New Brunswick	210	28.1	-9.3	17.8
Quebec	6,974	90.0	-4.1	-30.1
Ontario	11,920	92.2	-5.5	6.6
Manitoba	1,907	157.9	-21.6	-19.7
Saskatchewan	1,305	128.4	-18.1	32.1
Alberta	3,783	105.5	-4.3	8.3
British Columbia	5,391	123.0	-3.7	-22.1
Yukon	15	45.3	-7.8	-7.1
Northwest Territories	23	53.1	-11.0	13.7
Nunavut	16	50.9	22.3	94.9
Canada	**32,281**	**96.9**	**-6.7**	**-9.6**

1. Percent change based upon unrounded rates.
Note: Counts are based upon the most serious offence in the incident. One incident may involve multiple violations.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2 AGG) Survey.

Table 3
Police-reported robbery by census metropolitan area, 2008

Census metropolitan area[1,2,3]	number	rate per 100,000 population	percent change in rate from 2007 to 2008[4]	percent change in rate from 1999 to 2008[4]
500,000 and over population				
Winnipeg	1,771	232.7	-23.0	-24.3
Vancouver	3,894	170.8	-4.9	-31.6
Edmonton	1,935	170.5	0.9	10.7
Montréal	5,695	151.2	-2.1	-32.4
Toronto	7,378	133.4	-6.0	-0.2
Hamilton	824	116.9	-11.4	17.9
Calgary	1,286	108.4	-13.7	-13.3
Ottawa[5]	872	95.3	7.5	-20.5
Québec	354	48.1	-16.3	-37.2
Kitchener	238	46.6	-24.6	-25.1
100,000 to less than 500,000 population				
Regina	465	221.9	-11.9	30.6
Saskatoon	548	211.8	-29.4	1.0
Thunder Bay	157	131.3	-7.7	122.9
Abbotsford–Mission[6]	215	126.7	3.0	5.4
Halifax	482	122.2	-11.2	8.9
Kelowna[7]	166	95.0	14.3	...
Windsor	278	83.3	30.4	57.5
Saint John	80	78.5	30.7	74.1
St. Catharines–Niagara	335	75.8	-3.4	17.9
Victoria	255	73.5	-9.2	-35.6
London	355	73.0	3.9	27.1
Greater Sudbury	120	73.0	-9.3	40.4
Gatineau[8]	187	63.2	31.4	-1.5
St. John's	113	61.6	-17.1	105.0
Trois-Rivières	84	56.9	63.7	9.7
Brantford[7]	75	54.6	-35.1	...
Peterborough[7]	64	53.0	6.6	...
Sherbrooke	86	47.0	-21.1	-25.0
Barrie[7]	88	45.2	7.7	...
Moncton[7]	47	35.4	-27.4	...
Guelph[7]	39	32.1	-22.5	...
Kingston[6]	47	30.0	-19.2	7.7
Saguenay	36	24.9	-42.7	-1.8
Canada	**32,281**	**96.9**	**-6.7**	**-9.6**

1. A census metropolitan area (CMA) refers to a large urban core (at least 100,000 population) combined with adjacent urban and rural areas that have a high degree of economic and social integration. A CMA typically comprises more than one police service.
2. CMA populations have been adjusted to follow policing boundaries.
3. The CMA of Oshawa is excluded from this table due to the incongruity between the police service jurisdictional boundaries and the CMA boundaries.
4. Percent change based upon unrounded rates.
5. Ottawa refers to the Ontario part of the Ottawa–Gatineau CMA.
6. Abbotsford–Mission and Kingston became CMAs in 2001. As such, the percent change in the rate is calculated from 2001 to 2008.
7. Barrie, Brantford, Guelph, Kelowna, Moncton and Peterborough became CMAs as of the 2006 Census. As such, the percent changes are not calculated.
8. Gatineau refers to the Quebec part of the Ottawa–Gatineau CMA.

Note: Counts are based upon the most serious offence in the incident. One incident may involve multiple violations.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2 AGG) Survey.

Table 4
Police-reported robbery by type of location, Canada, 2008

Location of incident	number	percent	rate per 100,000 population	percent change in rate from 1999 to 2008[1]
Outdoor public location	**13,634**	**50.3**	**41.7**	**8.3**
Street	9,123	33.7	27.9	3.7
Parking lot	1,669	6.2	5.1	-16.8
Open area	1,646	6.1	5.0	23.2
Transit facility	1,196	4.4	3.7	107.1
Commercial or institution location	**10,682**	**39.4**	**32.7**	**-34.1**
Convenience store and gas station	3,518	13.0	10.8	-32.2
Bank or financial institution	1,240	4.6	3.8	-38.2
Other commercial place[2]	5,024	18.5	15.4	-33.4
School	560	2.1	1.7	-10.6
Other non-commercial place[3]	340	1.3	1.0	-62.6
Residence	**2,782**	**10.3**	**8.5**	**24.7**
Private dwelling unit ("home invasion")	2,679	9.9	8.2	22.4
Other private property structure	103	0.4	0.3	...

1. The percent change in the rate from 1999 to 2008 is based upon data reported by a subset of police services. In 2008, these police services covered 54% of the population of Canada.
2. Examples of "other commercial places" include office buildings and grocery stores.
3. Examples of "other non-commercial places" include community centres, hospitals and churches.

Note: Counts are based upon any violation in the incident. One incident may involve multiple violations. The total count of incidents presented in this table does not match the counts presented elsewhere in this report due to differing data sources and methodologies.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2 Incident-based and UCR2 Trend) Survey.

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Notes

1. A five-year penalty reflects the mandatory minimum for a first offence. For a second or subsequent offence, the mandatory minimum sentence is seven years imprisonment.

2. The General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization also collects information on the experiences of Canadians who report having been the victim of robbery. The 2009 GSS results are expected to be available in the summer of 2010.

3. Figures are based upon the most serious offence in the incident. One incident may involve multiple violations.

4. As a result of a methodological change to the way in which robbery incidents are counted by the UCR survey, revisions have been applied back to 1998. While this change resulted in a 12 to 13% increase in the number of robberies each year, it did not impact the trend over this period. For further information, see Wallace, Marnie, John Turner, Anthony Matarazzo and Colin Babyak. 2009. "Measuring Crime in Canada: Introducing the Crime Severity Index and Improvements to the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey". Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-004-X.

5. The UCR2 Trend database reflects information reported by a sub-set of police services covering 54% of the population in 2008.

6. The trend in residential robberies presented in Chart 6 excludes incidents that occurred in property structures that are not part of the main residence (e.g. shed, detached garage and driveway).

7. The following analysis is based upon the narrow definition of home invasion (i.e. robberies in residences).

8. The majority of this category is comprised of casual acquaintances but it also includes business relationships, friends and criminal relationships.

9. The UCR survey collects up to five different property types for each robbery incident.

Definitions

Accused
An accused person is someone against whom enough information exists to lay a charge in connection with a criminal incident.

Assault
A violent offence classified into three levels: level 1 or common assault, the least serious form including behaviours such as pushing, slapping, punching and face-to-face threats; level 2 assault, defined as assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm; and level 3 aggravated assault, defined as assault that wounds, maims, disfigures or endangers the life of the victim.

Incident
An incident is defined as the occurrence of one (or more) criminal offence(s) during one single, distinct event, regardless of the number of victims. If there are multiple victims or multiple accused persons, the offences must occur at the **same location** and at the **same time** if they are to be included within the same incident. The incident count will normally be lower than the victim count due to incidents involving multiple victims.